

**Testimony of
The Honorable Ashley Swearengin
Mayor of Fresno**

**Before the
Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
U.S. House of Representatives**

on

California High Speed Rail

December 15, 2011

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Ashley Swearengin, and I am the Mayor of Fresno, California. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee this morning.

I am pleased to offer my comments today in support of High Speed Rail as a cost effective transportation mode that makes a profit and drastically reduces travel times between regional destinations.

In reviewing the record of Congress, including this committee, I am pleased to see that there has been bi-partisan support for High Speed Rail dating back to the early 1990s through Republican and Democrat Administrations and Congresses alike. As a Republican mayor, and former economic development professional, I applaud that position and share that view for three reasons.

First and foremost is High Speed Rail's profitable business model. No other transportation mode in the world makes a profit and requires no public subsidies for operations. Yes, public dollars are required for the upfront capital costs, just as they are to construct highways, low-speed rail systems, or airports. But, once the capital costs are provided for High Speed Rail, the operational costs are paid for by the farebox – and you can't say that about any of these other transportation modes.

The second reason why I support High Speed Rail is the vast reduction in travel times it offers. Today, when Fresnoans need to travel to Los Angeles, they have four choices – car, plane, bus or low-speed passenger rail. Of those choices, the fastest option is to drive, which will take four hours IF you don't run into traffic. What are the chances of NOT hitting traffic in the L.A. Basin? Very good if you don't mind travelling between about 11:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m. With High Speed Rail, travel times to the L.A. Basin are reduced by over 60% to about an hour and 20 minutes. The same is true when connecting to the Bay Area.

I was asked recently when the last time was that I chose to take Amtrak. My answer? I almost never take Amtrak because it takes me so much longer to arrive at my destination than if I just

drove my own car. I choose the fastest transportation option that I can afford. Saying Californians won't choose High Speed Rail over their cars because they're not currently riding Amtrak is like saying "I didn't like my dial-up Internet service so I'm not going to like a fiber connection to my home." It's the wrong measuring stick. They are two completely different services.

The last, major reason I believe we need to pursue the development of High Speed Rail in California is because of the affordability of the ticket price. The business plan indicates the fare on High Speed Rail will be priced at 80% of what an airline ticket costs in LA or San Francisco, which is a tremendous cost savings for us in the middle part of the state. You see, a round trip airplane ticket from SFO to LAX is between \$120 and \$180. If you're in Fresno trying to fly to either LAX or SFO, you have to be prepared to pay at least \$250 if you're buying a month ahead and as much as \$1400 to \$1500 if you're buying just a few days in advance.

Again, we are talking about a transportation mode that makes a profit, requires no public subsidy for its operations and can be fully commercialized and operated by the private sector; reduces travel times by over 60% for regional travel; and offers an affordable ticket price (especially for Fresnoans who are paying, in some cases, 10 times more for regional air service)...this is something worth pursuing.

No city will benefit more from High Speed Rail than Fresno, a city of 500,000 people situated in one of the fastest growing regions in the country that is already home to 4,000,000 people.

Unfortunately, Fresno's distance from other major urban areas has limited our economic opportunity. Unemployment rates range today from 14% to 40% in Fresno County. Our region struggles to gain access to the economic networks of the L.A. Basin and the San Francisco Bay Area.

High Speed Rail changes that dynamic for a city like Fresno, which is why our local business organizations endorse this project. I submit today for the record letters of support from the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce, the Central California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Fresno Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corporation Serving Fresno County. The membership of these organizations is comprised of literally tens of thousands of businesses from throughout Fresno and the Central California region.

I also submit today for the record a January 7, 2011, op-ed written by the mayors of Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Jose, Sacramento, and Fresno. Together, we lead cities with a combined population of 6.5 million people. While there are differences between these mayors when it comes to partisan politics, we recognize what a smart solution High Speed Rail can mean for one of the biggest challenges our state faces: transportation congestion and mobility. Without solutions for California's transportation challenges, our economy is hamstrung, and California's economy being hamstrung does not bode well for the rest of the United States.

In closing, I want to tell you about a business called Commercial Manufacturing that's known worldwide for the production of food processing equipment. If you've ever popped one of the

“meal in a bag” products into your microwave you’ve probably eaten a product processed by Commercial Manufacturing’s equipment. It’s a great small business that employs 41 people and exports its products all over the world helping to add wealth to our economy.

Their world headquarters are at 2432 South Railroad Avenue in Fresno, which is right in the path of the proposed High Speed Rail alignment through Fresno. If constructed as proposed, High Speed Rail will plow through 3 to 5 of Commercial Manufacturing’s buildings. Of all the people in Fresno whom you would expect to be upset about the proposed High Speed Rail train, it would be Larry Hagopian, the business owner.

The business has been in his family for 73 years. Mr. Hagopian’s reaction to the proposed project? He says, “I see this as an opportunity to upgrade our facility which will allow us to improve our manufacturing techniques, thereby increasing sales which will increase our number of employees. Also, as a lifetime resident of Fresno, I see this project as a chance for Fresno to clean up its south and west sides bringing more people back to the core of downtown, not to mention the positive economic impact on the community from the jobs associated with high speed rail.”

Mr. Hagopian’s statement captures the sentiment I wish to convey to the Committee today. High Speed Rail is not without its challenges, but its operating model, dramatic improvements in travel time, and affordable ticket price make it a compelling opportunity for our state and nation. I urge support for High Speed Rail from this Committee and I urge your help with clearing the way for High Speed Rail in our nation.